

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 112466

FOL REPEAT OF PORT OF SPAIN 1148 TO SECSTATE INFO COGARD ONSUD
COMNAVELECSYSCOM WASHDC, CNO MAY 13

QTE:

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT OF SPAIN 1148

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, ETRN, TD

SUBJ: CLOSING OF OMEGA STATION TRINIDAD, RETURN
OF DEFENSE AREAS, AND TERMINATION OF
RE-ENTRY RIGHTS

COMNAVELECSYSCOM ALSO FOR PME-119

REF: STATE 077316

SUMMARY: ANT EXTENSION OF OMEGA FACILITY TRINIDAD
BEYOND EXPIRATION OF CURRENT DEFENSE AREAS AGREEMENT
IN DECEMBER 1977 WOULD REQUIRE NEGOTIATION OF
COMPLETELY NEW AGREEMENT WITH GOTT PROBABLY INCLUDING
DIRECT BENEFITS TO TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO. OMEGA
STATION WOULD NOT CONFLICT WITH CURRENT PLANS FOR
TRINIDADIAN DEVELOPMENT OF FORMER US BASE AREAS AT
CHAGUARAMAS, BUT NEGOTIATING EXTENSION OF OMEGA STATION
COULD BECOME CONTENTIOUS DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUE
HERE IN AN ELECTION YEAR. FROM POLITICAL STAND-
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POINT, DESIRABLE COURSE WOULD BE TO TERMINATE
ALL FACILITIES ASSOCIATED WITH FORMER NAVAL BASE
ON SCHEDULE IN 1977, BUT DECISION WHETHER TO SEEK
OMEGA EXTENSION ULTIMATELY SHOULD BE BASED ON

IMPORTANCE OF STATION TO USG AND TO WORLDWIDE
NAVIGATIONAL AND RESCUE NETWORK. END SUMMARY.

1. POSSIBLE USG INTEREST IN EXTENDING USE OF OMEGA
STATION TRINIDAD BEYOND CURRENT EXPIRATION OF
DEFENSE AREAS AGREEMENT IN DECEMBER 1977 RAISES A
NUMBER OF SERIOUS QUESTIONS WHICH WE RECOMMEND BE
ADDRESSED PROMPTLY IF SUCH AN OPTION IS TO
HAVE REALISTIC CHANCE OF FULFILLMENT.

2. WITHIN NEXT EIGHTEEN MONTHS, AND PROBABLY
WITHIN NEXT TWELVE MONTHS, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
WILL BE GOING THROUGH A NATIONAL ELECTION.
CAMPAIGN RHETORIC THERE CAN EASILY LEAD TO
UNHEALTHY REHASH OF STALE CHARGES THAT OMEGA
NAVIGATIONAL STATION IS PRIMARILY A MILITARY
FACILITY WHICH MAKES TRINIDAD VULNERABLE TO BIG-
POWER RIVALRIES. IF ANY OF POTENTIAL OPPOSITION
PARTIES TO PRESENT GOVERNMENT SHOULD WIN ELECTION,
WE ANTICIPATE THAT NEGOTIATING AN OMEGA AGREEMENT
WITH SUCH A GOVERNMENT IN THE FIRST MONTHS OF ITS
TENURE WOULD BE VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE. AT THIS TIME,
HOWEVER, OUR BEST ESTIMATE IS THAT PRIME MINISTER
ERIC WILLIAMS AND PEOPLES NATIONAL MOVEMENT (PNM)
GOVERNMENT WILL BE RETURNED TO POWER IN NEXT
ELECTION.

3. IT IS NOT FEASIBLE TO CONSIDER SIMPLE EXTENSION
OF DAA UNDER WHICH USG PRESENTLY OPERATES OMEGA
STATION HERE, SINCE GOTT DOES NOT PERCEIVE THAT IT
GAINS ANY BENEFITS FROM DAA AND AGREEMENT IS SEEN
AS ANACHRONISTIC REMNANT OF COLONIAL ERA AND REMINDER
OF DAYS WHEN USG HAD LARGE NAVAL OPERATING BASE IN
TRINIDAD. ANY EXTENSION OF OMEGA FACILITY WILL
REQUIRE ENTIRELY NEW AGREEMENT WITH TRINIDAD AND
TOBAGO, NEGOTIATED WITH REGARD TO OMEGA ONLY AND
UNRELATED TO FORMER DAA. WE WOULD ANTICIPATE THAT,
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AT BEST, GOTT WOULD WISH TO SHOW THAT IT OBTAINED
DIRECT BENEFITS FROM SUCH AN AGREEMENT, BENEFITS
FAR MORE TANGIBLE THAN GENERAL PARTICIPATION IN A
WORLDWIDE SYSTEM BENEFITING INTERNATIONAL
NAVIGATION. SUCH QUID PRO QUOS MIGHT WELL INCLUDE:
A) SIGNIFICANT LAND RENT; B) NOMINAL TRINIDAD
MANAGEMENT OF THE STATION; AND C) COMMITMENTS AS
TO THE TRAINING OR HIRING OF TRINIDADIAN PERSONNEL
AND PHASING OUT OF EXCLUSIVELY EXPATRIATE PROFESSIONAL
STAFF.

4. IF A PROPOSAL WERE MADE TO THE GOTT, WE MIGHT
EITHER GET A FLAT REFUSAL TO CONSIDER A NEW

AGREEMENT, OR A SET OF HARD NEGOTIATIONS NEVERTHELESS DESIGNED TO REACH AGREEMENT ON CONTINUATION OF THE FACILITY UNDER CONDITIONS WHICH COULD BE POLITICALLY SHOWN TO BE PROPITIOUS FOR TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO. WHICH OF THESE RESPONSES WE RECEIVED WOULD DEPEND DIRECTLY ON THE JUDGEMENT OF PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS AND ON THE INTERNAL POLITICAL (E.G. CAMPAIGN) CLIMATE AT THE TIME.

5. AMBASSADOR INFORMALLY RAISED THIS ISSUE WITH DR. WILLIAMS APRIL 22, NOTING POSSIBILITY THAT IT MIGHT BE DESIRABLE FOR TECHNICAL REASONS TO ARRANGE FOR CONTINUATION OF THE OMEGA FACILITY IN TRINIDAD BEYOND DECEMBER 1977. WILLIAMS DID NOT COMMENT DIRECTLY, BUT AT LEAST DID NOT REJECT THE POSSIBILITY AND HAS NOT SUBSEQUENTLY LAMBASTED THE USG PUBLICLY AS HE WAS WONT TO DO SO IN THE PAST WHEN HE FELT WE WRE TRYING TO PRESSURE HIM INTO SOMETHING HE DID NOT WANT. THUS PROGNOSIS IS MILDLY FAVORABLE.

6. ANOTHER NEW FACTOR IS PUBLICATION IN THE LAST WEEK OF APRIL OF THE CHAGUARAMAS DEVELOPMEDT AUTHORITY'S (CDA) FIVE-263-4, TEN-YEAR, AND LONG TERM PLANS FOR INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT OF THE FORMER US BASE AREAS AT CHAGUARAMAS. UNTIL THIS PLAN WAS DEVELOPED WE WERE UNABLE TO ESTIMATE THE COMPETING PRESSUE FOR ALTERNATIVE UTILIZATION OF THE PRESENT OMEGA SITE. THE CDA PLAN, HOWEVER, DOES NOT RECOMMEND DEVELOP-
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MENT OF THE PRESENT OMEGAHIITE, WHICH BECAUSE OF ITS STEEP WOODED TERRAIN THEY HAVE INCLWDED IN LAND RECOMMENDED TO BE RESERVED AS NATIONAL PARK AND WILD-LIFE PRESERVE. THUS, AT LEASTBIN THE SHORT RUN OF FIVE TO TEN YEARS, RETENTION OF THE OMEGA STATION WOULD NOT APPEAR INCOMPATIBLE WITH SCHEDULED DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHAGUARAMAS AREA.

7. THE POLITICAL FACTON , HOWEVER, COULD MAKE AN OMEGA NEGOTIATION QUITE DIFFICULT. THIS LEADS US TO FEEL THAT, OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL, IT WOULD BE DESIRABLE FOR OVERALL US-TRINIDADIAN RELATIONS TO CLOSE ALL FACILITTIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE FORMER DEFENSE AREAS AGREEMENT WHEN THAT AGREEMENT EXPIRES IN 1977. HOWEVER, THE IMPORTANCE OF OMEGA STATION TRINIDAD AND OF ITS CONTINUED OPERATION IS AN EVALUATION WHICH IS CRUCIAL TO ANY DECISION AND OBVIOUSLY A JUDGEMENT WHICH THIS EMBASSY IS NOT COMPETENT TO MAKE. IF THE USG CONSIDERED JUDGEMENT IS THAT THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUING THE OMEGA FACILITY IS SUCH AS TO
TAKE POTENTIAL POLITICAL LIABILITIES

INHERENT IN SUCH A SUBJECT SURFACING IN A HEATED
LOCAL ELECTION YEAR, AND USG IS PREPARED TO
NEGOTIATE REASONABLE QUID PRO QUOS UNDER
COMPLETELY NEW AGREEMENT, EMBASSY OF COURSE IS
PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE WITH GOTT AND TO SUPPORT
CONTINUATION OF OMEGA AS REQUIRED.

8. WE UNDERSTAND THAT FINAL RESOLUTION OF CONTINUED
PRESENCE OF OMEGA IN TRINIDAD MUST BE MADE BY
BEGINNING OF 1977 IN ORDER TO ALLOW FOR ORDERLY
TRANSFER OF STATION AND/OR FUNCTIONS ELSEWHERE
IF NECESSARY. SINCE ANY NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE
SOMWHAT PROTRACTED, A FIRM USG DECISION SHOULD BE
REACHED AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE SO THAT ACTUAL
NEGOTIATIONS WITH GOTT COULD BEGIN NO LATER THAN
MID 1976 IF OMEGA IS NOT TO BE PHASE OUT ON
SCHEDULE.
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